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ABSTRACT

Since an individual's ability to think critically most often manifests itself orally, research on sex differences should not overlook interpersonal communication styles and patterns in relation to the critical thought process. Any such examination should (1) define critical reasoning as it exists within Western society; (2) examine perceptions of men's and women's abilities to "think" and communicate critically; (3) discuss the ramifications of such perceptions; and (4) suggest ways feminist theory can be integrated into the critical thinking curriculum. Critical thinking has been defined as reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do. Western society often identifies emotion as an obstacle to effective critical thinking--and women are stereotyped as behaving more emotionally than men. The first step in a feminist reinterpretation of the critical reasoning mode must be to debunk the myth that women, considered "emotional, non-rational" individuals, are inherently less able than men to think critically. Rather, women have been socialized not to think at all, and even in today's "post-feminist" society, conflicting messages create schizophrenic options for women. A reevaluation of the critical reasoning mode would restore emotion to its rightful place in the critical thinking model, and an even more progressive approach would consider varied models of critical thinking, not necessarily based on Western culture. (References are attached.) (NKA)

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Integrating Feminist Theory into the Communication Curriculum: A Focus on Critical Thinking

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In the past ten to fifteen years much research has been conducted on the differences between men's and women's communication styles in general. Specifically, such studies examine linguistic features, paralinguistic cues, nonverbal behavior, and conversational styles that reveal some differences in overall communication patterns of men and women (for a thorough review of this literature see Pearson, 1985). The results of this research often has been contradictory and is inconclusive in many respects. However, this research is valuable in revealing that there are definite perceptions of women's and men's styles, whether or not these perceptions are accurate. For example, communication behaviors often associated with men and more highly valued by society include highly assertive speech; impersonal and abstract style, with limited self-disclosure; competitive, "devil's advocate" interchanges; and interruption of other speakers, especially women. Communication behaviors often associated with women and devalued by society include less assertive speech characterized by false starts and hesitations, high pitch, and tag questions; more personal styles with much self-disclosure; "inappropriate" smiling; averting eyes, especially when dealing with men and those in positions of authority; and maintaining more eye contact with conversational partners.

Although research on gender differences in communication is relevant and revealing, such research overlooks one area of communication that recently has received a great deal of attention from rhetorical scholars: critical thinking or reasoning (see Walsh and Paul, 1987). Advocacy of the ability to think critically for the purposes of analysis and persuasion in public speaking dates back to Aristotle. Critical reasoning as an appropriate subject for teaching and research is now experiencing a revival not only in Western society, but also universally, as evidenced by the interest in and attendance at such meetings as the Annual and International Conference on Critical Thinking and Education Reform.

Because one's ability to think critically more often than not manifests itself orally, research on gender differences should not overlook communication styles and patterns in relation to the critical thought process. Such styles and patterns should be examined because they may contribute to or even create gender stereotypes for women and men in contemporary society, and these stereotypes inevitably are the source of misattribution and miscommunication.

Consequently, the four purposes of this essay are to: 1) define critical reasoning as it exists within Western society; 2) examine perceptions society maintains of men's and women's abilities to "think" and communicate critically; 3) discuss the ramifications of such perceptions; and 4) suggest ways feminist theory can be integrated fully into the critical thinking process. We will begin with a definition of critical reasoning.

Critical Reasoning

The Seventh Annual and Fifth International Conference on critical reasoning and Educational Reform defines critical reasoning as: a) a body of intellectual skills and abilities which enable one rationally to decide what to believe or do; b) a body of dispositions (see Ennis, 1985)

c) a set of values: truth, fair- or open-mindedness, empathy, autonomy, rationality, self-criticism. Further, the individual who reasons critically is one who analyzes arguments, asks and answers questions of clarification, judges the credibility of a source and establishes criteria for doing so, makes observations and judges observational reports based on an established criteria, engages in deduction and induction, and finally, balances, weighs, and makes value judgments. Ennis (1985) offers an additional working definition of critical reasoning as "reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do." In his essay, "The Critical Spirit," Harvey Siegel suggests the following as characteristics for a "critical thinker":

> ...a critical thinker must have a well-developed disposition to engage in reasoned assessment. A critical thinker must have a willingness to conform judgment and action to principle, not simply an ability to so conform. One who has the critical attitude has a certain character as well as certain skills; a character which is inclined to seek, and to base judgment and action upon, reasons; which rejects partiality and arbitrariness; and which values such aspects of critical reasoning as intellectual honesty, justice to evidence, sympathetic and impartial consideration of interests, objectivity, and impartiality...A possessor of the critical attitude is inclined to seek reasons and evidence; to demand justification; to query and investigate unsubstantiated claims...Such a person habitually seeks evidence and reasons, and is predisposed to so seek--and to base belief and action on the results of such seeking (Siegel, 1987).

The Role of Emotion in the Critical Reasoning Process

The preceding definitions and descriptions of critical reasoning place a strong emphasis on one's ability to reason. The concept of emotion as a variable in the critical reasoning process does not emerge, in spite of the fact that Aristotle and other classical rhetoricians and philosophers underscored the need to view "emotion" as a form of proof in any persuasive endeavor (Lange, 1983; see also Kennedy, 1963; Timmis, 1977). However, contemporary Western society as a whole and those involved in the teaching of critical reasoning often identify the characteristic of emotion as an obstacle to effective critical thinking. This negative assessment is evident in the number of critical reasoning and argumentation texts that

categorize emotional appeals as fallacies or "pseudo-reasoning" (Jensen, 1981). In her essay, "Integrating Feminist Philosophy into Traditional Philosophy Courses," Ann Garry points out that white European male thinkers "paid little or no attention to the female half of the human species in constructing their generalizations, theories, and conceptual schemes" (1986, p. 6). Garry goes on to say this neglect of women is not surprising given the history of the West and she questions whether or not there is something masculine rather than gender-neutral about our notions of rationality and logic.

This assumption about the nature of rationality and logic is reinforced by Broverman's (1970) discussion of male-valued and female-valued stereotypic items, which identifies the following as female-valued stereotypic items: very emotional, does not hide emotions at all, very subjective, very easily influenced, dislikes math and science very much, very illogical, unable to separate feelings from ideas (Broverman, 1970; also see Doyle, 1986, p.60). The preceding inventory of supposed female traits is not consistent with the standard definitions of critical thinking, as represented by those offered earlier in this essay, and illustrates the dominant societal perception that women lack critical reasoning skills and abilities. For example, the stereotype of women as unable to separate feelings from ideas deviates from Siegel's suggestion that the critical thinker is one who is "objective and impartial" and "seeks reason and evidence." Females, according to Broverman, are also identified as disliking math and science, both disciplines that require the ability to engage in inductive reasoning and make inferences. The notion that women "dislike math and science very much" allows one to infer, therefore, that females also may dislike engaging in the inductive process and making inferences. Again the implication is that women are not or do not care to be rational creatures and are not viewed as such. Finally, if one does not care to make the "inferential leap" that women are not rational, based on the preceding stereotypes, Broverman's findings include the explicit stereotype that women are "illogical."

An article in the Los Angeles Times entitled, "There's More to Crying Than Meets the Eye" indicated that women tend to cry at least once a week compared to men, who cry on the average once a month (September 9, 1987). The study suggests that there may be physiological as well as cultural reasons for women crying more than men, specifically that females have increased levels of prolactin and that there may be anatomical differences in men's and women's tear glands that contribute to women's increased tendency to cry. Whatever the cause, "crying" is typically viewed as a female behavior and one that detracts from women's credibility as reasoning individuals because of the stereotypical perception of rationality and emotion as necessarily separate processes. Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder was criticized for her recent highly-emotional speech announcing her decision not to run for President, which caused some to

question if she were capable of running for, let alone holding, the office of President. Geraldine Ferraro faced many of the same questions about her ability that were based almost entirely on her sex.

In a discussion of Luce Irigaray's study on women and language, Cheris Kramarae points out that Irigaray finds it "difficult to describe the language of the female, other than to say it is not governed by an Aristotelian type of logic" (Kramarae, 1981, p. 69). In our Western society, critical reasoning, and ultimately, communicating, is grounded in Aristotelian logic. Based on Irigaray's observations one may infer that women are not perceived as logical creatures in terms of our thinking or our use of language, and that men, on the other hand, are.

Although the foregoing discussion is somewhat limited in its scope, it does offer the foundation for further study in the area of gender and critical reasoning, and indicates that society views women as less able than men to think and communicate critically. However, whether women are more emotional because of their physiology or because of cultural conditioning, or perhaps both, is not the real issue. What matters is the belief, inculcated in our culture, that "emotion" is polemic to logic and that women must become less emotional in order to survive in this (a man's) world. The following discussion will examine the options available for altering perceptions of men and women in relation to their ability to think and communicate critically.

Some research suggests that women think differently than men (see Belenky, et al., 1987), but there is no reason to believe that women are incapable of thinking critically and logically. Therefore, the first step in a feminist reinterpretation of the critical reasoning model must be to debunk the myth that women are innately unable to think logically and rationally.

We know from research conducted on the right and left hemispheres of the brain during the last three decades that each hemisphere is regarded as specializing in particular cognitive functions (see Eccles, 1977; Segalowitz, 1983; Springer and Deutsch, 1981; Wittrock, 1977). Researchers generally believe the left hemisphere controls such functions as language and logical, deductive reasoning, and that the right brain controls visual-spatial ability and non-linear, holistic, creative types of thinking.

The common perception is that women are "emotional, non-rational" individuals and therefore right-hemisphere dominant. Men, regarded as rational and logical, have been presumed to be left-brain dominant. However, these stereotypical evaluations are not supported by research. Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) exhaustive study of approximately 1500 reports of sex difference research uncovered relatively few consistent sex differences across studies. Among the few sex differences they did find consistently supported, though, were that males

excelled in visual-spatial ability, a right-brain function, and females outperformed males in language ability, for which the left-brain is dominant. Evidence of language ability suggests that women may have dominance in the left hemisphere. We know, for example, that females acquire language earlier than males, say their first words sooner, put words together into phrases sooner, and put word groups together into sentences sooner than boys. Females outscore males on verbal aptitude tests throughout their schooling (through high school). Males are much more likely to suffer from language-related disorders such as aphasia, dyslexia, and stuttering (see Eakins and Eakins, 1978; Segalowitz, 1983). More recently, researchers working with stroke patients have speculated that the right and left hemispheres in women may be less lateralized, i.e., less polarized, and therefore function more interdependently. Females who suffer strokes that affect the left side of the brain recover language abilities to a greater extent and more quickly than males do. When one hemisphere of the brain is effected by a disorder such as a lesion or a stroke, the other hemisphere is able to take over to an extent and pick up some of the lost functioning (Segalowitz, 1983).

Based on research findings such as those cited above concerning the physiological structure and function of the human brain, there appears to be no reliable evidence to indicate that women have an inherent inability to think critically. Stereotypically, however, men have been seen as rational and women viewed as emotional. This perception continues today, despite evidence to the contrary. Therefore, it seems safe to say that the inadequate representation of women in critical reasoning is due in large part to historical/sociological factors.

Historically, women have not been allowed to think. Although Aristotle's conception of critical reasoning is a more holistic model incorporating both the rational and the emotional, Artistotle did not formulate his work with women in mind and did not intend to apply his critical thinking model to women. Subsequent rhetorical scholars and philosophers have followed faithfully in Artistotle's footsteps and have continued to exclude women from the realm of critical reasoning.

Women fought hard to gain the right to equal educational opportunities. Even after Oberlin College began admitting women, which paved the way for the subsequent opening to women of other colleges and universities, the number of women receiving college diplomas lagged far behind the number of men, and continues so. Today women remain at a disadvantage. The percentage of women in college has increased steadily, but is still exceeded by the percentage of men, and the number of women in colleges and universities declines steadily as one moves up the educational ladder from undergraduate to graduate and professional schools (see "Chilly Environment in the Classroom").

Women have been socialized not to think. Even in current society, euphemistically dubbed "post-feminist," conflicting messages create schizophrenic options for women. Today's young woman is encouraged to go to college, to pursue a career, and yet all too often she also receives the message not to think too much, not to be smarter than a man (especially if she is interested in him). It is assumed that it is a compliment to tell a woman that she "thinks like a man," and women are advised "not to worry their pretty heads."

Thinking has been viewed as an activity not consistent with the feminine model, and therefore discouraged in the socialization process of women. The Judeo-Christian ethic upon which our culture and most of Western society, for that matter, is based, extols the male as head of the family and dictates that women should be submissive to men, and therefore not do too much independent thinking. "Wives, be submissive to your husbands" is interpreted to mean that women should not question. The "cult of true womanhood" which historian Barbara Welter (1966) has argued was the dominant socializing force for females during much of the 19th century, upheld the values of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness--not virtues that would lead to or require independent, critical reasoning.

Ehrenreich and English(1973) have chronicled the tremendously crippling impact of the medical industry upon women in the 19th century. During this period, there was a virtual epidemic in the diagnosis of "nervous prostration" or "neurasthenia" and women were advised--in fact, ordered--not to think because cognitive activity was viewed as a major contributor to their condition. However, as Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1973/1899) detailed grippingly and poignantly in The Yellow Wallpaper, the problem actually was the reverse--women suffered because they were not allowed to think, to exercise their minds. Gilman's work was based on her personal experience of a nervous breakdown. Her physician advised her to allow herself no more than two hours of intellectual work per day and admonished her to "never touch a pen, brush, or pencil as long as you live" (Gilman, 1935, p. 119). The symptoms exhibited by women that often led to inaccurate diagnoses by the medical profession are the very behaviors exhibited by people who are bored and frustrated.

Women are socialized to use emotion as a way of getting what we want, in place of logical argument. Paula Johnson (1976) examined the six power bases originally described by French and Raven (1959) and found that women rely primarily on indirect, personal power and strategies of helplessness. The message--perhaps implicit but still powerful--given to women is that we can get what we want by using emotion.

Women traditionally have been relegated to the emotional realm. Women are socialized to be emotional beings. Communication research indicates that women incorporate much more

emphasis on the affective component of communication. Women are better listeners (Pearson, 1985), and better at facilitating conversational interaction (Fishman, 1983).

In view of the preceding findings it appears necessary to consider how feminist theory might be incorporated into the communication curriculum, specifically in the area of critical reasoning. One tactic that might be proposed is to pursue a course of action that enables women to compete successfully with men in the critical reasoning arena. Arguments say that critical reasoning is vital for success in many areas of daily life, for example, law (see Johnson and Yinson, 1987). In addition, mathematics and science rely on logical, linear thinking for much of their work, and it seems necessary to right the sex inequity and imbalance existent in those fields.

This "compensatory" approach to rectifying an imbalanced and unequal situation was used initially by women's studies programs and departments to make inroads into the academy. The rationale behind the actions was to compensate for decades, even centuries, of inequality by concerted, concentrated effort to "mainstream" women or "bring them up to standards." The compensatory approach dictates that in order to compensate for past grievances--omitting women from the study of critical reasoning and overlooking women as capable of critical reasoning--we must now ensure that women are included in classes in which critical reasoning is taught and used. Many colleges and universities have instituted critical reasoning requirements and have designated classes that satisfy these requirements. One might assume, and we can only hope, that there are no longer any barriers imposed upon women that prevent them from enrolling in these classes. But we must ask whether women and men in those classes are treated equally. There is evidence to suggest that educators favor male students (Doyle, 1985, p. 101), and we can assume that this effect would be exaggerated when the teachers perceive that males have a built-in advantage in a particular subject area. We need to ensure that once in a classroom females and males are challenged equally.

Controversy over the compensatory approach lies at the heart of much ideological battle within feminist ranks. The compensatory approach often uses a "means versus ends" approach as justification. The presumption is that the desirable end justifies a less-than-satisfactory method of accomplishing the goal. The philosophy seems to be: Let's make women equal to men and they will have a better chance of succeeding--in law school, med school, graduate school. The drawback to this approach is that an automatic assumption is made that the male or masculine is the standard and women must then be measured against that standard. Using the male as the standard relegates women always to the role of "other" (deBeauvoir, 1952), and

thus constructs "woman" as inherently deficient from the start, even if we eventually become proficient in the skill or aptitude and "meet" the male standard.

Despite the evidence cited above arguing that women have no inherent, biologically-based deficiencies that prevent us from thinking linearly and logically, feminists and others have posited that women think differently from men. Belenky and her colleagues, authors of Women's Ways of Knowing (1986), explain that the impetus for their book arose from a concern about "why women students speak so frequently of problems and gaps in their learning and so often doubt their intellectual competence" (p. 4). The result of Belenky, et al.'s efforts is an examination of how women think--"women's ways of knowing--based on in-depth interviews with over one hundred women. The conclusion Belenky et al. drew is that "...educational and clinical services, as traditionally defined and practiced, do not adequately serve the needs of women" (p. 4).

The failure of our educational systems, including the teaching of critical thinking, is due to the stereotypical, narrowly-delineated and circumscribed definition of critical thinking as exclusively rational and linear. The authors of Women's Ways of Knowing assert this when they state:

> Relatively little attention has been given to modes of learning, knowing, and valuing that may be specific to or at least common in women. It is likely that the commonly accepted stereotype of women's thinking as emotional, intuitive, and personalized has contributed to the devaluation of women's minds and contributions, particularly in Western technologically oriented cultures which values rationalism and objectivity (Sampson, 1983). It is generally assumed that intuitive knowledge is more primitive, therefore less valuable, than so-called objective modes of knowing. Thus, it appeared likely to us that traditional educational curricula and pedagogical standards have probably not escaped this bias (Belenky, et al., 1986).

The difficulty in admitting that women and men may think differently is that it is nearly impossible in our culture for difference to be seen as neutral and not value-laden. But we can no longer consider women as the deviation from the norm. What we need, instead, is another approach that will accomplish an integration of feminist theory into the critical reasoning curriculum and pedagogy and will not uphold a male model as an impossible standard. Instead of changing women to conform to a male model, we must change the model itself. We need a reconception of critical reasoning that will lead to a new definition and model of the critical reasoning process. Abandoning an "illogical" adherence to the male as standard frees us to reconceptualize ideas about human behavior, including cognitive behavior, and allows us to

recognize that females and males may behave differently, but that differences don't necessarily imply that one method must be the model and the other method necessarily inferior.

For example, the work of Carol Gilligan and her colleagues suggests an alternative to traditional understanding of the development of moral reasoning. Their work points out the fatal flaw in adopting a male model: inevitably women fail to "measure up" and are forced to play a catch-up or justification game. According to Kohlberg's model of moral development, women consistently "fail" to "measure up" to the standards imposed by his model. Kohlberg and others report that women consistently reach only level three on Kohlberg's six-level hierarchical scale, on which levels 5 and 6 are the most desirable levels. Men more consistently reach level 4.

The work of Gilligan and her colleagues has forced us to re-evaluate the assumptions upon which Kohlberg's entire model is based, primarily because his theory was formulated based on exclusively male data. Breaking out of the mold that forces us to see things in terms of one standard against which all else is measured, Gilligan argues for a new model that allows for gender differences without imposing a value judgment on the two modes.

Another theorist who advocates changing the model rather than the individuals is Georgia Sassen (1980), who has argued persuasively against the contention that women are victims of a "fear of success" trait, a concept first articulated by Horner (1968) and subsequently applied stereotypically to women, although research has not supported the contention that "fear of success" is an exclusively female trait. The problem, Sassen suggests, lies not with women, but with the fact that we have conceputalized "success" too narrowly. We have taken the term and imbued it with a definition that is money- and power-based, and essentially male. What happens, she questions, if we redefine "success" and then reassess the thematic apperception test responses that were originally coded as negative, indicating a fear of success? Examining these new images in a new light enables one to make a new interpretation, and Sassen argues that many of the women whose responses to thematic apperception cues were coded negatively definined success and interpreted and made sense of their environment according to the way in which they had constructed the world (Sassen, 1980). Sassen challenges the status quo model when she says, "It no longer seems appropriate to rout out success anxiety and replace it with acceptance of the masculine rules of the game. Rather, women now need to focus on affirming the structures and values they bring to the question of competition versus relationships and start reconstructing institutions according to what women know."

We propose a similar, "critical" re-evaluation of the critical reasoning model. Specifically we advocate restoring emotion to its rightful place in the critical thinking model, as Aristotle originally envisioned. Such a restoration, of course, implies that we as scholars

advocate a Western model of critical reasoning, which finds its roots in classical thought and ideology. Certainly this is one approach to the "critical" re-evaluation of society's current model. As a more progressive approach we urge consideration of varied models of critical thinking--a perspective our colleagues in intercultural studies have taken in terms of communication overall. Perhaps women need to be viewed as a different culture whose reasoning process deserves recognition and study as does any other culture's. In other words, we should regard the "way" women reason as different, rather than inferior, just as the "Eastern" or Asian way of thinking is coming to be perceived as a different but not negative method of reasoning. We suggest this approach as a viable means to integrate feminist theory into the communication curriculum and into society as a whole, with regard to critical reasoning. With an understanding of the current model of critical reasoning and insight into the perceptions society holds of men's and women's ability to reason and communicate, researchers in the field of communication generally and critical reasoning specifically can begin to examine women as a culture that has developed its own process of reasoning. Then and only then can we begin to change the negative view society maintains of women and emotion, as well as develop a model of critical reasoning that integrates male and female characteristics into the critical thinking process.

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